

HIGH MASS

A SIMPLE GUIDE

FIRST of all, a word as to the surroundings in which the Service is offered. We regard the Altar as God's Throne, where, in the Sacrament, heaven is opened to us here upon earth. The lighted candles speak of Christ, the true Light of the World. The Altar hangings and the robes of the priests vary in color according to the day or season of the year. *White* is worn on feasts of our Lord and Saints who were not Martyrs; *Red* on feasts of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Cross, and Saints who shed their blood for Christ; *Green* on ordinary occasions, *Violet* in Advent and Lent, and on occasions of special supplication; *Black* on Good Friday and at Masses for the Dead.

The robes, or vestments of the three Ministers of the Mass are very like those worn by our Lord and the Apostles. We are to think of Christ, the great High Priest, whose representatives they are.

THE ASPERGES

On Sundays the Service begins with the *Asperges*. During this the priest sprinkles the Altar, himself, his assistants, and the congregation with Holy Water. This is a reminder of our

Baptism, by which we were made members of Christ's Body, the Church. This part of the service concludes with a short prayer for God's blessing on all present, after which the priest changes his outer robe, called a Cope, for the Chasuble, a mantle which represents the seamless robe of Christ.

THE INTROIT

The choir begins to sing the *Introit*, an anthem which sets the keynote, or theme, of the Mass of the Day. Meanwhile the Ministers say a short service of preparation. While the choir continues the Introit, the priest censes the Altar. In all ages, incense has been a reminder of God's presence, and is one of the two odours associated in the Bible with the life hereafter.

THE KYRIE ELEISON

Having finished the Introit, the choir sings a brief litany, the *Kyrie eleison*. This is often sung in Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written. The words may be found at the top of page 70 in the Prayer Book. Meanwhile the priest and his assistants read the first part of the Communion Service.

THE GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

Then, unless he is wearing violet or black vest-

ments, (as for example in Advent, Lent, or at Funerals), the priest intones *Glory be to God on high*, and the chant is continued by the choir and congregation. The words may be found on page 84 of the Prayer Book.

THE COLLECT

After this comes a short prayer called the *Collect for the Day*. Often one or two additional Collects are sung. It is an ancient custom to stand for the Collect at High Mass.

THE EPISTLE

Then the Minister appointed, called the Sub-deacon, sings the *Epistle*. This Bible lesson is usually taken from one of the Epistles in the New Testament.

THE GRADUAL AND ALLELUIA

After the Epistle, two scriptural anthems called *Gradual* and *Alleluia* are sung. The Gradual is so called because it was anciently sung from the *gradus*, or step, of the choir. In Lent and at Funerals the *Tract* is sung in place of the Alleluia. In Eastertide the Gradual is omitted and the Alleluia is expanded. On a few occasions these anthems are followed by a hymn, called the *Sequence*, which tells about the meaning of the Mass being offered. During the singing the

Ministers prepare, by special prayers and blessings, for the singing of the *Holy Gospel*. This Bible lesson is always taken from one of the four Gospels of the New Testament.

THE HOLY GOSPEL

The Minister appointed to sing the *Holy Gospel* is called the Deacon. The Subdeacon holds the book while the Deacon sings. The lighted candles are symbols of Christ the True Light; the incense is a token of our homage to Christ the Eternal King, whose very words are being proclaimed.

THE CREED

After the Gospel has been sung, the priest intones the first words of the *Creed*, found on page 71 of the Prayer Book. This is continued by the congregation and choir. It is our custom to kneel at the words beginning "And was incarnate" — out of reverence for our Lord's becoming Man. At the end we make the sign of the Cross in token of our allegiance to our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE SERMON

If there is to be a *Sermon*, it is usually preached at this point in the service, and this is also the place for announcements.

THE OFFERTORY

The Sermon ended, the *Offertory* begins. After

the choir has sung the Offertory Sentence, choir and congregation join in singing a hymn. Meanwhile, the bread and wine are being solemnly offered to God by the priest; and the gifts of the people are received and offered at the altar. Incense is blessed and offered. The bread, the wine, the altar, the priest, the assistants in the sanctuary, the people; all are censed, for all must be "holy unto the Lord."

THE PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH

First asking the people to pray with him, the priest says the *Prayer for the whole state of Christ's Church*. This begins on page 74 of the Prayer Book. (Since Holy Communion is ordinarily not given at the late Mass, the Exhortation, General Confession, and the other devotions which are printed after this Prayer are omitted. But if High Mass is celebrated at an hour when it is possible for the people to come fasting for their communions, these devotions are said.)

THE SURSUM CORDA AND THE PREFACE

After the Prayer for the Church comes the *Sursum Corda* and the *Preface*, which is sung by the priest. This is to be found at the bottom of page 76 and the top of page 77 of the Prayer Book. After the Preface the choir sings the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy, etc.) and a little

anthem called the Benedictus. It is an ancient custom to stand for the *Sursum Corda* and the Preface.

THE PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

Then comes the *Prayer of Consecration*, which is the most solemn part of the Mass. This is found on page 80 of the Prayer Book. The bells mark the moment of consecration, when the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. This prayer concludes with the *Lord's Prayer*.

THE AGNUS DEI

The *Agnus Dei* is then sung by the choir. During the singing of this anthem the priest receives Holy Communion; and if any of the congregation are to receive they go to the Altar Rail when the bell is rung.

THE COMMUNION

The choir sings the sentence from Holy Scripture called the *Communion*, and often follows it with a motet. Meanwhile the priest consumes what is left of the consecrated elements, and rinses the cup with wine and water.

THE POST-COMMUNION AND BLESSING

Short prayers of thanksgiving, called *Post-Communions*, bring the service to a close. It is an

ancient custom to stand for the Post-Communion prayers. After the *Blessing*, page 84 of the Prayer Book, the priest reads the Last Gospel.

THE LAST GOSPEL

The Last Gospel, so called to distinguish it from the Gospel of the Mass, is usually the Gospel for Christmas Day, which is on page 97 of the Prayer Book. Occasionally some other lesson from the Gospels is read; for example, when All Saints' Day is celebrated on Sunday, the Gospel for the Sunday, which would not otherwise be heard, is read as the Last Gospel.



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